

## **Let's Unite And Build Bridges**

Sunday January 1, 2023

### **1Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV)**

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has

put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,  
25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts  
should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every  
part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.  
27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

## **Introduction**

- I want to open my first message this year with an expression of deep gratitude to you for your kindness towards me, my wife and my family. Thank you for the gifts, cards and well wishes so many of you extended to us during the Christmas Season. Please know that our thoughts, prayers and deep appreciation for you are sincere, and we thank God for the privilege of being a part of your life in ministry.
- Our theme this year is "let's unite and build bridges".
- As we came out of the pandemic restrictions last year, Pastor Granville had our eyes on the theme "restore, refresh, renew". To me it's a miracle how God has worked in 2022. At the beginning of the year many people felt disconnected, discontented and dry. At the end of the year there are many testimonies of healing at different levels. Many disconnected people have had relationships restored. Many discontented people are talking about a refreshed burst of spiritual energy. Many people who were in a dry place have

had their strength renewed. I'm just so grateful to God for coming through.

- Now, our calling is to the people of Faith. And there are some here who still need to be refreshed, restored and renewed. But we are in a much stronger position as a church to provide the environment for that than we were coming out of COVID. That's why 2023 is about uniting and building bridges.
- A bridge is a structure built to span a physical obstacle such as water without blocking the way underneath. It is constructed for the purpose of providing passage over the obstacle, which is usually something that is otherwise difficult or impossible to cross.
- Life, with all its obstacles, is going to happen to each of us. In John 17:15 Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."
- So, today I want to make the case for why we are going to unite and build bridges, with some examples of things we can do to make this happen. We'll start with unity:

### **1. Let's unite as one body in the Spirit**

- In the scripture reading, Paul was talking about unity and diversity in the body of Christ at Corinth, in the context of being filled by God's Spirit. Verse 12 says, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." He

used the human body as the example to continue the imagery that Jesus used. And this is compelling because all his hearers have bodies, so in our natural lives we are living the point he is making. Most people would agree that in your body you are one. It's almost obvious until you start thinking of the different organs and functions in the body. Some of you may have watched the cartoon movie "Osmosis Jones" which is a fun way of teaching kids about white blood cells, germs and different processes in the body. With that in view, the line "in your body you are one" can be acceptably modified to "in your body you are united".

- But what is it that unites the body of Christ? It is His Spirit. Verse 13 says, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." The power and benefits of unity lie not in the body, but in the Spirit that is in the body at the same time that the body is in the Spirit. He both surrounds us and is in us. The only part we play is to make the choice to be in the Spirit.
- Psalm 133 tells us how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Because it is in unity that God commands the blessing of eternal life. This isn't an option, it is a command. But David's choice of description makes this psalm powerful for Israel specifically. 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running

down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. The anointing oil was specially prepared for the function of anointing the priests, the mediators between God and His people. The garments the priests wore had the names of each tribe of Israel inscribed upon them so that every time the priest came before God, the people were represented. The beard was a sign of dignity to men in Israel and other communities in that time. So, that unique oil poured upon one priest who recognized his dignity had the power to bring a community into one mind with their Creator and His purpose – eternal life. That's unity!

**Illustration:** In 2022 I told you that I would focus on developing our prayer life at Faith because God showed me that prayer is a foundational pillar for the mission He has called us to. We now have a team that has prayer going several times every day during the week. And while we encourage in person attendance whenever that's possible, you can access all our prayer services through the Zoom prayer line listed on our website. When we pray together we unite in spirit; we unite in power; we unite in purpose and we draw closer to one another in one accord as we move on the mission God has us on.

**Application:** We are Christians who have chosen Faith as our home church. Unity is about all of us being aligned on where God is leading us in this season. I get it that all Christians are here to advance Jesus'

mission to seek and to save the lost. But we are to do that within a particular context and era. In that sense, our mission is unique at this time at Faith. During the year we will do our best to share God's mission for us, so that we can all end up wanting the same thing. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. That's why I strongly urge everyone who calls Faith your church to get involved in corporate prayer on a regular basis. And we'll fast on Fridays 6am to 6pm on alternate months beginning in January. As we are filled with the Spirit together continually, we'll rise to the type of unity that changes communities.

**Transition:** But how does this roll out in the way we do life together?

## **2. Let's build bridges because our uniqueness combined makes us strong**

- Continuing on with our scripture reading at verse 14, Paul says, 'Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. In other words, we are one body but that doesn't make us just one part.

There is uniqueness in our make up.

15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.' The fact that you admire someone else's gifting and fail to appreciate your own doesn't mean that you are any less important to God. If you're the foot, be the best foot the world has

ever known, and walk “fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” (Ephesians 6:15) It’s in your ability to do **that**.

16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. It cuts both ways.

- 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? To be part of something greater than what we are alone is an incredible thing. For example, if all the islands are the same, there’s nothing to be gained from sharing. Total self sufficiency leaves no incentive for connection. The value comes **because** they are different.

You may recall how in Genesis 11:6–7 God observed that “if ***as one*** people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.” He was talking about their plan to build a tower that would reach to the heavens so that nothing could scatter them across the earth. Even in their disobedience, their unity got God’s attention. So He confused their language so they would not understand each other. He smashed the bridges that held them together. Different and divided then, their capacity was constrained.

- But now, that same Spirit of God wants to bring us together.

Reading from verse 18, "But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. God wants you to be unique for His glory. Celebrate that! But understand that synergy awaits your choice to reach out to others.

Verse 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" Hear me keenly when I tell you that if you can't see beyond yourself, you'll never understand the need for unity.

Nor will you experience things that are bigger than you already are.

That's why the great reversal of the separation at Babel happened in the book of Acts only when they were all together in one accord as Jesus had instructed them. (2:1) God separated humanity using language and united the church using language. Yet the story of the early church is one of Spirit-filled believers reaching out to build bridges to fellow believers. It's way bigger than any one of us.

**Illustration:** Early in 2022 I told you that I would try to reach every family on our records. I called as many of you as I could. Those who I couldn't reach by phone, I sent greeting cards. Some conversations were very easy because I know the people very well. Most conversations were nice even though I may not have met you

personally. One or two others were a bit more difficult because people were hurting and not in a place where we could connect. But I completed my list and I can assure you that if your name is with the church office, I at the very least tried to reach you in 2022. Why? Because it's not enough to be united in our destination. We need to build bridges if we're going to create the vehicle for God's people to get there. While I'm here, please ensure that your contact information is current with the church office. Right now quite a few numbers and addresses are missing or incorrect.

**Application:** So I'm asking you to begin to build bridges this year. You be the one to reach out. Believe me when I tell you that I know there's a price to doing this. But it's worth it. If you can sing or play an instrument, talk to Bro Ryan and ask him for next steps and timelines. If you know that you have the gift of praying, talk to Bro Chris and ask him for next steps and timelines. If you volunteered and it didn't go quite as you'd hoped, learn from the experience and don't draw back. If someone offended you and you're hurting but for some reason can't get it resolved, reach out to me and we'll walk through your challenge together. Because the church cannot do without your uniqueness. It's God given, and He's given it for His church. So, let's be magnanimous in building bridges. Only then can we share our strengths and become something more than we are right now.

**Transition:** Yet when we unite and build bridges it isn't to minimize what God has called us to be. Rather:

### **3. Let's create community that encourages the best in everyone**

- This is where we get our proverbial knickers in a knot. The fact that we're not as good as someone else in their area of gifting doesn't mean that we should relax in our area of gifting. We should demand excellence of ourselves so that, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." (Ecclesiastes 9:10) Indeed, Paul wrote that different parts of the body can't say they don't need each other. 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. Indispensable means that you cannot live without them. Strange: the strong one can't live without the weak one. In fact, Paul takes it further.
- 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. Look at that! To make it plain, you cover parts of your body that perform the basest of functions, while other parts right on the top of your head, you even leave unkempt. What's seemingly weaker, or less honorable, actually receives more honor.

But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. God created this whole system called the body so that it functions at its best when there is codependency. When the members want the same thing, and they recognize the unique value they and others bring to making it happen. When the members in a sense see Psalm 139:14 "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well", it is out of gratitude not pride. But the human body is just the example to illustrate Paul's main point: 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

**Illustration:** This thing about creating community that encourages the best in everyone is pivotal to God's desire for our church. I'll say this line many more times but I want you to hear this for yourself, personally. We believe in the dignity of the human being, that everyone is made in the image of God to become the best that they were created to be. God made you to excel in your area of gifting. And the overarching reason for your excellence is the promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ that leads all people to salvation.

**Application:** Now, how do we create this community that encourages the best in everyone? Well, as we grow larger, we need to stay small in order to maintain intimacy. That's why I promised to resuscitate our Life Groups in 2022. We have a group of leaders that have been meeting monthly and sharing together. The number of people attending Life Groups has increased steadily. And the goal of not letting anyone fall through the cracks is being achieved. So, I encourage you to reach out and build that bridge. Join a life group and be part of the infrastructure that creates the community we so desperately need.

### **Conclusion**

- Let's unite and build bridges this year. Let's end 2023 with a tapestry so strong, that no devil can pull anyone God sends to us through the cracks, because there won't be any cracks. Because in that environment, people will grow to be the best that God created them to be.
- If you haven't given your life to Jesus, and you still have questions about why we'd put so much effort into creating this community, you should know that you're it. We're so grateful for what God has done for us that we want to do whatever's in our power to give you the chance to meet Jesus and experience His life changing power.

- The inconvenient truth is that everyone has sinned and fallen out of relationship with God. There's a way back, but it is specific and intentional. We all must recognize that we have sinned, we must say we're sorry for our sins, and we must ask Jesus to come into our lives and save us. Then our journey to a life in Christ begins.
- Bridge builders, if you need refreshing in the Spirit for the task, join us as we pray right now.
- Let's pray!